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THE UNESCO MEDIA DECLARATION

ANNCR:

THE 146-NATION U.N. EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION -- UNESCO -- THIS WEEK ADOPTED UNANIMOUSLY A DECLARATION ON THE NEWS MEDIA WHICH FOR YEARS WAS A BONE OF CONTENTION AMONG MEMBERS. VOA'S JOHN BUE HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

SIX YEARS AGO IT WAS A SOVIET PROPOSAL FOR STATES TO USE THE MEDIA TO COMBAT WARMONGERING, RACIALISM, AND APARTHEID. DESPITE THE LAUDABILITY OF THESE AIMS, FREE-PRESS NATIONS SAW IT AS AN ATTEMPT, WITH THEMES DESIGNED TO APPEAL TO NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES, TO GET UNESCO TO GIVE ITS MORAL BACKING TO THE NOTION OF STATE CONTROL. THEY ALSO SAW IT AS RUNNING COUNTER TO UNESCO'S OWN COMMITMENT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND A FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION.

THIRD WORLD NATIONS RAPIDLY INTRODUCED ANOTHER NOTION -- THEIR DESIRE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CONCERT OF WORLD NEWS DOMINATED BY DEVELOPED NATIONS' POWERFUL MEDIA.

FREE-PRESS NATIONS WERE SENSITIVE TO THIS NOTION, RECOGNIZING THAT FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION INVOLVES IN ALL FAIRNESS A BALANCED FLOW.

BEFORE THE CURRENT CONFERENCE, UNESCO DIRECTOR GENERAL AMADOU MAHTAR MBOW ATTEMPTED TO DEFUSE THIS DIVISIVE ISSUE BY REDRAFTING THE DECLARATION. BUT THE TEXT HE PRODUCED WAS REJECTED BY FREE-PRESS COUNTRIES AS STILL CARRYING THE GERMS OF STATE CONTROL AND OPEN TO USE AS A PRETEXT TO HARASS AND CENSOR NEWS CORRESPONDENTS ON FOREIGN ASSIGNMENTS.

AFTER FOUR WEEKS OF INTENSIVE BEHIND-THE-SCENES NEGOTIATIONS, DURING WHICH FREE-PRESS, COMMUNIST, AND THIRD-WORLD NATIONS ONCE AGAIN SPELLED OUT THEIR POSITIONS, MR. MBOW CAME OUT WITH A REVISED TEXT ADDING HUMAN RIGHTS AS AN OBJECTIVE, CLEARLY COMING OUT FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, AND GUARANTEEING GOOD CONDITIONS FOR JOURNALISTS ON THE JOB BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE TEXT IS NOT LEGALLY BINDING, BUT BECAUSE OF THE UNANIMOUS BACKING OF MEMBERS, UNESCO SEES IT AS HAVING MORAL VALUE AS AN INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENT.

LINGERING FEARS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSED IN SOME FREE-PRESS COUNTRIES THAT THE DECLARATION MIGHT STILL BE USED AS A WEAPON AGAINST JOURNALISTS. BUT U.S. OFFICIALS SEE NO DANGER OF THIS, POINTING OUT THAT ARTICLES ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS CAN BE INVOKED IN CASES OF VIOLATIONS.

THE SOVIET UNION IS SAYING THE DECLARATION WAS ORIGINALLY ITS OWN IDEA AND IS STILL PUSHING THE NOTION OF THE DUTY AND RESPONSIBILITY OF JOURNALISTS NOT TO INDULGE IN WARMONGERING, RACIALISM OR APARTHEID, A NOTION REMOVED FROM THE REVISED DRAFT.

THE THIRD WORLD'S NON-ALIGNED NATIONS SAW IN THE DECLARATION WHAT THEIR SPOKESMAN, TUNISIAN INFORMATION MINISTER MUSTAPHA MASMOUDI, CALLED A "GREEN LIGHT" TOWARD A NEW WORLD COMMUNICATIONS ORDER.

MISTER MASMOUDI PRAISED THE APPROACH ADOPTED BY THE UNITED STATES AND SEVERAL OTHER FREE-PRESS NATIONS CALLING FOR CONCRETE ACTION TO HELP THIRD-WORLD NATIONS IMPROVE THEIR MEDIA. BUT HE EMPHATICALLY MADE THE POINT THAT TECHNICAL FACILITIES, ALTHOUGH ESSENTIAL TO GIVING THE THIRD WORLD A STRONGER VOICE IN THE WORLD INFORMATION CONCERT, DO NOT ENTIRELY MEET ITS CONCERNs.

HE COMPLAINED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT DEVELOPED NATIONS' NEWSPAPER READERS NEVER HAVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT THE THIRD WORLD WRITTEN BY THIRD WORLD JOURNALISTS.

THE DEBATE ON THIS ISSUE WILL CONTINUE AS A UNESCO-SPONSORED INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON WORLD COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEMS PURSUES ITS WORK, AND AS VARIOUS PROJECTS TO HELP THE THIRD WORLD TAKE SHAPE. AMONG THESE, THE U.S. PLANS TO PROVIDE SATELLITE FACILITIES TO DEVELOPING NATIONS, JOURNALIST TRAINING SCHEMES, AND HAS PROPOSED THE CREATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS TO MOBILIZE FINANCING FROM WORLD BANK AND OTHER SOURCES FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF MEDIA IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THE PROPOSAL WAS ADOPTED BY UNESCO WITH THE SUPPORT OF THIRD-WORLD NATIONS.

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